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OCCASIONAL PAPER.

Cambridge Mission to Delhi,

IN CONNEXION WITH THE S. P. G.

THE LEATHER-WORKERS

OF

DARYAGANJ.

BY THE

REV. G. A. LEFROY, M.A.

CAMBRIDGE MISSION, DELHI.

1884

CAMBRIDGE MISSION, DELHI,
Sept. 8, 1884.

DEAR DR WESTCOTT,

A POINT has, I think, been reached in our work amongst the poor Chamár Christians of Delhi which will justify some account of our progress and present position. And at the outset let me say one word with regard to our own relation to that work. It has more than once been objected to me by friends of our Mission in this country, and such as have really understood the special aims with which our Brotherhood was formed, that this work lies altogether foreign to the scope of our true labours, and that in allowing ourselves to become entangled in it we have acted wrongly and have so far crippled ourselves, by loss of time and thought, for carrying out our original programme. It is not unlikely that a similar view may be held by some at least of our friends in England, and so it seems worth while to explain, whether by way of apology or to remove misunderstanding, what has led to the present state of affairs. And in the first place I might urge that the clause in the original statement of our Mission which defined our work to be "*in addition to other Evangelistic labours*" certain special undertakings, is of a scope at least sufficiently wide to include the work of which I am at present speaking, and in point of fact I do not suppose that it was ever for a moment intended, that in addressing ourselves especially to the upper classes and the more thoughtful heathen, we should wholly ignore the claim of the poorer lower and possibly less thoughtful classes who are so particularly numerous in this country, and to whom the Invitation seems so specially to address itself.

But it is not on any wording of programmes or even on any general theories of work that I would base the justification of the

course we have pursued in this matter, but on the far more weighty and authoritative teaching of circumstances. I think you were present—as several of us now out here were—at a sermon preached before the Cambridge Church Society by Dean Stanley, in which he spoke at length of Bp. Mackenzie, and gave as the principle which had underlain and formed that simple and noble life, the rule always ‘to do what was natural under the circumstances,’ and certainly if this may be accepted as a true guide for conduct, I cannot think that we should have been acting in accordance with it, or indeed otherwise than most unnaturally under the circumstances in which we found ourselves placed, if we had refused to take a share in the work which was being carried on amongst the Delhi Chamárs. For I need scarcely remind you that this work is none of our seeking or of our creating. So far from this it is now more than 20 years since attention was especially directed to this caste, and Catechists appointed not indeed exclusively but very mainly with the object of teaching and influencing them. For many years the results of this effort, though not altogether lacking were still very small, and I think there can be but little doubt that had we at that time and while the work was still so to speak merely tentative, reached Delhi, we should have held aloof from it almost or altogether, as having no special claim on us and not falling within our proper province. But during the famine of 1877-78 things materially altered, for during these and the two or three following years large numbers of these poor people came forward to receive Baptism, and after longer or shorter periods of probation and preparation were admitted to the Church of Christ. It was at this point that our Mission came upon the scene, and we found ourselves at once face to face with a body of Christians, including indeed among its numbers a fair sprinkling of men of a very different and really Christian type, for the most part Catechists or agents of the Mission in other capacities, but with an overwhelming majority of men drawn from this caste, numbering some eight hundred souls, and giving rise to the gravest problems of future discipline and organisation; how grave you will have gathered from much that you have already heard and may still further realise, when I repeat that of this eight hundred it was only a small minority who had been in the eye of man at any rate in any real way affected by their Christianity, the rest remaining in full fellowship with their caste, sharing in its feasts, idolatrous and otherwise, adhering to the old ceremonies of birth, marriage, death, wholly ignoring Sundays, etc. ; Christians in short in

nothing but name, and yet it must be remembered in name Christians, and as such representing to the rest of the people of Delhi, high and low, rich and poor, the Church of Christ in this great city. Things being thus, could we have taken any other line of action than that we did? Would it have been, I will not say natural under the circumstances, but even possible or in any way morally justifiable for us to decline to assist Mr Winter in the tremendously difficult task which lay before him, and at which he set to work with might and main on his return from England in 1879, of raising the whole spiritual position of these poor people and bringing home to them the glory and dignity of the privileges to which they had been admitted as well as the responsibility of the duties they had assumed? Nay, simply from the point of view of our own more special work such a course would have been suicidal: for as I have said the true state of things was well understood and widely known throughout the city; and while it may no doubt be and in fact is a question, on which a good deal of difference of opinion exists as to exactly how far the Mahommedans and high class Hindoos could be influenced, either for better or worse, by the spiritual condition of a people whom they look upon as separated from themselves almost as widely as the brute creation itself, yet there can be no doubt whatever that it lent a ready and all too powerful handle to any antagonist, who wished in the Bázár or elsewhere to laugh at Christian work, while it must have influenced others exactly in proportion as they came within the circle, and felt the influence of Christian teaching, affording them an ever present test of the truth of its claims, and of its power to raise those who accepted it to a higher, purer life. It was this conviction, the conviction of the crucial importance, for the sake of all future Christian work among whatever class in Delhi, of removing from the outset a stumblingblock and scandal which could not but most grievously affect any efforts which might hereafter be made, which more perhaps than anything else decided us—and would I am sure have decided you—to devote some portion of our time to this task. I say some portion of our time advisedly, for on this point too there seems to exist some misunderstanding, and many seem to think that we have for better or worse thrown ourselves almost wholly into this work and made it our special sphere. Nothing could possibly be further from the truth. In point of fact we each devote two evenings in the week, one Sunday and one week-day, to visiting and preaching in these little district congregations, and, so far as actual working time is concerned,

*that is all*¹: while the majority of us at present out here teach from two to four hours daily in the School and College, not to mention the

¹ I ought perhaps to make a slight exception in my own case, for I have recently been entrusted with an office which involves the outlay of some little time and thought, though I fear it scarcely receives so much of either as it deserves considering the magnitude of the interests involved. The office to which I refer is that of marriage-registry-officer for the native congregation in Delhi, by which I would have you understand nothing in the most remote degree connected with the celebrant of secular as opposed to religious nuptials, but a kind of central confidant for all the eligible young persons of both sexes in the neighbourhood to whom they may entrust, together with a short statement of their personal advantages, their hopes and longings with reference to the married state, and whose effort it is to arrange and bring to completion such unions as may seem to contain the greatest promise of a long and happy domestic life. The office is perhaps a somewhat peculiar as well as delicate one, and for the relief of any of the weaker brethren who may find in this a singular outlet for monastic energy, and it may be even stumble thereat, I may perhaps explain a little further the circumstances out of which such a state of things have arisen. The problem is in reality a simple one. One of the very first and chiefest aims in life of the parents here, I allude, of course, more especially to the class of which I am at present speaking, is to secure betimes the suitable betrothal of their children. I say betrothal, because it is in this country a ceremony wholly distinct from marriage, and often preceding it by many years, taking place at any age between two and twelve years old, earlier perhaps, but not later without very grave reason or incurring the risk of serious responsibility. The conditions of such suitability in the mind of the anxious Father are chiefly three. (*a*) That the parents of the other child should be living, or failing this, that there be some other responsible person able and prepared to undertake the expense of the marriage feast, etc.; (*b*) that the partner selected be, if possible, lighter, at any rate not *darker in colour* than his own offspring; and (*c*) that he or she come of a stock not only unconnected by blood with his own, but even without the slightest, and as it would appear to us not wholly undesirable bond of friendship or even casual acquaintanceship. It is on these lines that I have to work, and the method of action is not difficult. I enter in a book the names of all children for the disposal of whose hand and fortune no other engagement has already been made, and whose parents express their wish that such should take place by Christian rites, and then, whenever a father intimates to me that he is desirous to conclude a betrothal for his olive-branch, I try to select a partner, fulfilling as far as possible the above conditions. Sometimes negotiation is required to carry a proposed engagement to a successful issue. This was notably the case in one instance which occurred some time back. An engagement had been suggested between two parties who seemed in all respects suitably matched, the age especially being all that could be desired, as the boy was eight and the girl six years old, but unfortunately the boy's father, who lived in a village a little distance from Delhi, and had some difficulties about accepting exclusively Christian rites, hung back. I arranged to go and talk the matter over with him, but so serious did his objections seem in the mind of those who knew him best that, on the day in question, I was deserted by all those who

time given to Language, Private Study, Catechists' and Readers' Classes, Bázár preaching, College Club meetings and the like. It is no doubt true that this branch of our work does occupy a larger share in our thoughts and conversations as well as in our monthly Council meetings, and perhaps in our Annual Reports, than the proportion of actual working time assigned to it in the division I have just spoken of would seem to indicate. But this is simply due to the nature of the work itself. For while the educational work moves on in its accustomed channel from day to day and without for the most part giving rise to many questions of general interest or burning problems, the case is exactly the reverse with this more directly pastoral work in which, as I have already said, most weighty questions are of constant recurrence.

So much by way of preface, and now I may turn I think with a free conscience to the recent events which have more immediately called for this letter. To enable you to understand them in their true bearing, I must begin with some reference to a change which has recently taken place in our policy with regard to these poorer Congregations. There are obviously two ways in which individual converts to Christianity—and it is with such alone that

among our little Daryaganj flock are usually my heartiest supporters in these simple and earnest efforts for the domestic prosperity and happiness of our Christian brotherhood, and left to bear the brunt of the battle, and probably the burden of defeat, alone. Nothing daunted I girded myself up for the task, summoned the whole male population of the village, for I need scarcely explain that these are matters of absolutely general interest, in which every 'bhai' or member of the caste has an almost equal vote with the father, and urged my case so vigorously that in a couple of hours' time a successful issue was reached, and the engagement there and then (in the absence it is true of the girl, but of what consequence was that?) formally completed. This piece of successful diplomacy brought my fame as a match maker (if a word of so questionable a character can be applied to functions so pure and lofty) up to fever heat, and applications for engagements flowed in apace. Unfortunately amid this press of business an accident, such as may occur in even the best managed institutions, happened, which, for the moment at least, caused a complete reaction, for, by the slightest clerical error in the entry of the names in my book, I almost succeeded in bringing together in the important betrothal rite two young persons, admirably matched in almost every other respect but both, by an amusing coincidence, of the *male* sex. For a time this unfortunate incident, causing as it somehow seemed to do a most unfavourable impression, completely stopped the run on my office, but I have little doubt that by renewed efforts and a still more scrupulous attention to even the slightest wishes of my clients my previous proud position may be before long regained.

we have at present to do in this country—may be dealt with as regards their future place of abode and manner of living, the one being to leave them in their own surroundings, and, as far as possible among their own people, in the hope that they may be a witness to guide others from among them into the truth, the other being to separate them off almost or altogether from their old associations and gather them together into a knot by themselves. The latter policy is usually known as that of segregation; to the former perhaps because it is so perfectly obvious and simple, no special name that I know of can be given. It is not difficult to account for the fact that the segregation policy is that which has, in greater or less degree, been followed by far the greater number of Missions. In the first place the caste prejudices of Hindoos, and to an almost equal extent the bitterness of Mahommedans, makes it quite impossible for a convert, if living as so many of them do in a kind of clan fashion, two or three generations and all degrees of relations massed together in one house, to continue his old position among them as though nothing had happened. He *must*, whether he wishes it or no, go out from among them and set up for himself. But this, to mention no other difficulty, means of course greatly increased expense which he is very frequently not able to undertake. What then more natural than that he should take refuge in the Mission Compound where he can usually find, not only a house sufficient for his wants and not seldom free of rent, but also a Christian atmosphere and congenial companionship secured from the taunts and insults to which he would certainly be, for some considerable time at least, exposed if living in the open Bázár. Add to this the natural hope on the part of the Missionaries that by bringing Christians together into a purer air, away from their old and so often debasing surroundings, a higher standard and tone of Christian thought and life may be evoked, many, it may be, feeble sparks combining to form a really vigorous and active flame, and it will not seem strange that this is the policy which, whether in the form of a Christian village entirely distinct from all surrounding habitations, or in the modified form of a Mission Compound in the city of size sufficient to afford shelter to as many as are at present likely to need its refuge, has been most commonly followed. Now while on the one hand it is hard not to think that the plan of leaving them to be a light to their own world, where more than elsewhere their influence and testimony ought to make itself most powerfully felt, is really the truest and highest, it is also certain that

the segregation plan is by no means an entire success, tending as it so constantly does to foster a more or less exotic life, and above all to put the converts at once into a position of immediate dependence on the Mission and Mission support, and in too many cases to substitute a very living faith in it and the depth of its purse and the compassion of the stringholders for any more real and worthy reliance on the great Giver of all. How far I am guilty of treason in saying this I do not know, for nothing is so apt to attract the attention and please the sentiments of friendly visitors to Missions as the little Christian village with its church, its pastor's house, its schools, and so much that brings back all that is best and dearest to us at home. Nevertheless, I believe that though in one or two cases under exceptionally wise and careful direction such villages have thriven, yet in many cases the dangers of which I have spoken have made themselves felt, and most strongly by those who have most to do with them, and have the greatest opportunity of seeing how they affect character. Whether it was the general theory or the experience of other Missions which had had most weight with Mr Winter in forming his decision I cannot say, but, from whichever cause—probably from both—he had in the case of these poor Chamár Christians wholly abstained from anything approaching to a segregation policy and had left them entirely among their own people to be a light to them. This I may remark in passing was possible partly because of the imperfect Christianity of too many of these converts, partly from the fact that they do *not* mass together in one large home in the way I have above referred to as common among the higher and wealthier classes, but live for the most part each in a most diminutive house of his own, but still more because of the lowness of their caste which cannot afford to indulge in the distinctions and prejudices in which the higher Hindoo so mightily delights. In the highest classes a man will often refuse, as I have been credibly informed by my own Munshi, on religious scruples, to eat food with his brother should there have occurred anything approaching to 'incompatibility of temper' between them. In Mr Winter's position we on entering the work most heartily concurred, believing it to be in every way the highest and wisest line. But during the last two years this conviction, chiefly under the teaching of sad experience, has been considerably modifying itself in, I believe, the minds of all of us. For while we still maintain that in theory, and given sufficiently powerful material for the experiment, this plan is far the best, yet we have been forced to recognise

that while even a very weakly flame, a farthing dip—if I may be allowed an expression which has been already used in this connection—*may* shed around it a light faint indeed, and yet amidst the surrounding blackness of darkness by no means to be despised, on the other hand it runs—especially if exposed to a raging storm—a very considerable risk of being itself entirely quenched. And this is what it seemed to me was happening, and that our poor people, starting from but a very low tone of Christianity themselves, so far from being able to influence, were quite unable to resist the mass of heathenism in the midst of which they lived, and that till they were freed from this contact and brought by some means or other into a purer air, there was but little chance of their attaining any true manhood in Christ. This view was most fully borne out by the testimony of those among themselves in whom any real strivings after a higher truer life were beginning to make themselves felt: they always begged us to separate them off from their neighbours and give them a place to themselves, representing that till this was done they felt their utter impotence to make any head against the evil around them. Influenced then by these considerations we determined after much hesitation and deliberation to try the experiment of a modified form of segregation, not taking them away from their trade or out of the city into a wholly distinct village, but settling a few of the more earnestly-disposed amongst them in a little square of houses apart by themselves but at the same time in the midst of the dwellings of their old caste-fellows. Here they would be free to carry on their own trade under precisely the old conditions, and while they would be exempt from the actual intrusion into their midst of idolatry or any other abomination from which they honestly wished to escape, they would at the same time be so situated that their whole life and tone would be known, and if it did indeed rise to a higher standard, very speedily make itself felt on their neighbours. Several reasons seemed to point to Daryaganj, a district of the city, as the name imports on the river bank, as a suitable spot for this which we felt to be a most weighty experiment, involving as it did in great measure the abandonment of a theory to which we had hitherto held tenaciously. Accordingly a little square containing eight houses was built, and these were let to any Christians who professed that they wished to strive after a nearer approximation to the life to which their baptismal vow had pledged them, and were ready, in token thereof, to accept the following simple conditions which were indeed involved in the very idea of the place, viz. :

- (1) to observe Sunday as a day of rest,
- (2) to use Christian rites exclusively at times of birth, marriage, and death,
- (3) to abstain from the use of charas¹.

On these terms two or three men were forthcoming at once, one in especial who had already at a meeting of our little local congregation some time before subscribed to these rules preparatory to being elected chaudri or head-man (a functionary answering somewhat to a very unmistakable churchwarden) of our district, and in the course of a month or two all the other houses were filled with men, differing a good deal so far as I could judge in the earnestness of their Christianity, but all I hope and believe, urged by at least some stimulus of pure motive. For a time things went on happily enough and we had every reason to congratulate ourselves, in a preliminary kind of way, on the success of our experiment, but it was not long before troubles begun to crop up, and these really arose necessarily from the position in which these men now found themselves placed. On the one hand they had advanced so far as to commit themselves definitely in some respects, at least, to a Christian manner of life. On the other, they had not yet made that open and final severance from their old caste which would free them from its claims and secure them from the temptation of being invited to share in its festivals and rites. The natural outcome was a continual bickering between the different families as to what was and what was not consistent with their new and more distinctly Christian attitude, each member being inclined to be very liberal in the concessions which he made to himself and the favour with which he regarded the invitations of his own old friends, but very much the reverse where his neighbour was concerned, and this quarrelling increased so much as to threaten the very life of the little community. I went to see them one day preparatory to leaving Delhi for a few days' work in the district, and things looked so bad that I left them with a sad heart, thinking it only too likely that before I returned

¹ Charas I should explain is a drug, very similar in its properties and action to opium, much used, and almost always with a degrading effect, by many of the members of this caste, and, so far as I have been able to ascertain, in a rather special degree among the chamárs of Daryaganj. It is used chiefly for smoking in the huqqa or large pipe. Considering that they themselves regard the use of it as a low and debasing custom accompanied with almost certain moral degradation, we thought it especially desirable to resist its introduction even in the smallest quantities from the first.

they would have completely broken up and gone off again to their old life. But by the grace of God it was not so, but rather this fighting, resulting legitimately as one may almost say it did from their equivocal and undecided position, proved the means of bringing them forward another step in the right direction of decision for Christ. The night after I left as they were talking together somebody, I know not who, recognising the true cause of their troubles, suggested that—instead of falling back into their old position, and so, to put it on no higher ground, bringing on themselves the ridicule of all Christians and Chamárs alike—they should take another step forward and definitely break off connection with their old brotherhood. It was obviously the true and the only true solution of the difficulty, but to act upon it required a degree of determination and courage of which there had been previously but little trace among them. For of course the step would involve the loss of whatever position they had hitherto held among their caste fellows. It is true that this was at all considerable only in the case of one man, the *chaudri* or headman to whom I have already referred, and who held a similar position amongst a small section of the *Daryaganj Chamárs*. The honour had been purchased by his grandfather, as such honours mostly are among these people, at the expense of a feast involving an outlay of some six or seven hundred rupees, after which the dignity passes on from father to son, and is regarded as a very real and very important part of the family property. To voluntarily relinquish this would of course cost any man an effort, but even in the case of the others who held a merely subordinate position of full membership in the caste it must have seemed a somewhat formidable proposal to convene a meeting of all the older and most respected members of their community, to whom they had always been accustomed to defer, and whose collective opinion was final in all internal disputes affecting members of the caste, and then standing up before them renounce publicly all further allegiance or connection. This is the way, and the only recognised way, in which such severance can be effected. You will not therefore be surprised that the proposal to take this step met with but faint approval at the time, and was followed by several days of anxious and conflicting counsels. Rather I think one has reason to be thankfully surprised and to trace the direct working of the Holy Spirit in the fact that the higher view did ultimately prevail, and our tenants settled to convoke such a meeting as that I have described, and then and there

to terminate connection with their old caste and break the bands which they felt were tying them down to the lower life. It was a curious, and, viewed in the result, a happy coincidence that during these very days not only was I absent in the district but the Catechist also for special reasons was unable to be with them as much as usual. For, while it might naturally have been anticipated that this absence, at such a critical juncture, of the guidance and support upon which they are most accustomed to rely, would have had a prejudicial influence on the decision, on the other hand when it proved otherwise this very fact lent a spontaneity and reality to their conduct which would have been in part at least lacking had it seemed to be merely the result of our instigation and exhortation, while it also materially contributed to strengthen their own firmness of attitude and determination to go through with the course they had of their own free will resolved upon. I need not tell you how happy I was, how deeply thankful to Him from whom all holy desires and all just counsels as well as all good works proceed, when I found the turn which things had taken. It was determined to call the important meeting as soon as possible within a week of my return. Messengers were sent round the whole city and suburbs to convoke those whose attendance was required. The method of summoning such meetings or 'Panchayats' is well recognised, forming as they do the continual court of appeal in all classes and castes of the Hindoos throughout this country in all those matters which are decided by internal arbitration, and not by resort to the of course superior, but so to speak foreign, and far less heartily obeyed authority of the English courts. They are attended, not I need scarcely say by the whole male population, who, numbering for instance in the special caste of which I am speaking some ten or twelve thousand, would form a quite unmanageable body, but by the heads of the numerous little clans or boroughs into which by a wholly natural and spontaneous principle of organization each of the larger castes has got broken up. In the case of the Chamárs even these heads are too numerous to be often brought together to one spot, and so they have formed themselves into three main divisions, called in Urdu *Bawáni*, i.e. *fifty-two* villages or clans, indicating the original number of representatives in each, though in course of time these too have been largely modified. Each division constitutes an amply sufficient tribunal for any ordinary disputes which its members may bring before it, though in cases of very exceptional magnitude the three occasionally coalesce

and form one supreme court. In the present case it was only the particular Bawáni to which our people belonged that was summoned, consisting of some 250 representatives. The time of meeting, the invariable and only possible time as we were assured, may strike you as it certainly did us who were expected to attend as remarkable, if not inconvenient—being midnight—though indeed high precedent may be adduced in our own land for the conduct of deliberations at such an hour. It was significant that the convocation was strenuously opposed, by fair and unfair means alike, by some of the *Christians* of the district who looked upon the proposed step with anything but approval, since they saw well enough how closely they were themselves concerned in the principle involved, and how certainly, if it were accepted, it would mean for them also sooner or later the necessity of choosing between their two lives, Christian and Chamár, definitely abandoning the one and pursuing the other. And indeed this was a point of view which we had ourselves by no means overlooked, but which we had most anxiously considered before finally sanctioning the proposal of the Daryaganj men. For while the main body of the Chamárs are perfectly ready to continue on terms of friendship and brotherhood with those of their number who have received baptism, so long as these are practically content to merge their Christianity in their Chamárship, on the other hand we knew it was highly probable that any move, such as that now contemplated, in the direction of making a definitely fresh start and disowning allegiance to the old brotherhood as such, would most probably be responded to on the part of the latter by a general call to all, whether originally engaged in this movement or not, to declare themselves openly the one thing or the other, accompanied by the exclusion of all who stood firm to their Christianity from the privileges of their caste. And, with the exception of these few men who were proposing of their own free will to occupy this position, there were but few of whom we seemed at present to have ground for hope that they could sustain such a test, while there was of course always the hope that by letting things go on quietly in their accustomed course without hurrying on the moment of final decision, others might gradually advance to the point from which it would be easier for them to go on than draw back. On the other hand we did not *know* that any such retaliatory move would be taken, and in any case we felt that in our present position of extreme weakness or half-heartedness any movement towards strength must be for good,

however much it might seem at the moment to cost. It was in this conviction that we determined to go through with the proposed meeting. And certainly it was one, the memory of which will stay by many of us, I think, for long. We got down to the spot (I forget whether I have said that the Daryaganj Christian Basti was the chosen place of convocation) just before midnight, the Mission clergy being present in force, with the exception of Haig and Wright who had but recently reached the country, and who, their acquaintance with the language being at the time confined to some valuable rudiments, which did not include the more delicate idioms of the common tongue, felt strongly the rival and surely, I may say, at such an hour, legitimate claims of the couch. There was no moon and the little court-yard was lighted only by 'glims' of the very feeblest nature, so it took us some time to ascertain the exact position of affairs. We then found that some 200 of the Chamárs had already arrived and were sitting together, while the Christians—these consisting chiefly of the families of the *Basti*, the Catechists, Readers, etc., of the mission and a few other of the more earnestly disposed Christians from other districts—were massed together a little apart. We found of course, and as all previous experience might have told us would be the case, that we were much too early, and that there were still various preliminaries to be got through before the business could begin in earnest. The first thing was to send and insist on the attendance of some few men, living chiefly we were thankful to find in the immediate neighbourhood, who had failed to present themselves, and we were amused and somewhat maliciously pleased to hear that these were, for the most part, those very Christians who had tried to frustrate the meeting altogether, but having failed in this had determined at any rate to keep clear of it themselves. Not a bit of it. Two or three brothers were despatched to the abode of each, and insisted, doubtless by most fraternal, but evidently by sufficiently cogent arguments, on the necessity of their attendance. They came in one by one sheepishly enough. Meantime we were getting the Christians better arranged together and trying to induce some of those who had taken their place among the Chamárs to come out from among them and range themselves with those to whom by name they belonged. In some cases we were successful, in others not, and as might have been expected, the later conduct of each man was plainly foreshadowed in the response which they made to this preliminary invitation. At last all were assembled and we were hoping that

we might proceed at once to business, as it was now past one a.m.; but again we had a trial of patience, for it seemed that nothing in the way of formal deliberation could be entered on till refreshments, consisting of some very simple kind of sherbet, had been served round to all assembled. Nothing is done in a hurry in this country, and the present proceeding was no exception to the rule. Suffice it however that by about 1.30 or perhaps a little later the ball was really opened. The first move was on the part of our Catechist who gave a short résumé of the events which had led to the present meeting, and thanked them for having all responded to the summons, and then called on our Chaudri and the other men to do their part. This they did simply and well. Standing up they one after the other expressed their appreciation of the comfort which they had enjoyed and the consideration they had met with in their old connection, but regretted that they had now reached a point in their new life as Christians which made it impossible for them to continue on the old terms of fellowship, and they therefore wished to say that for the future, while they were, and always would be, glad to reckon many individuals as personal friends, they would have nothing to do with the Chamár Brotherhood, as such; they would not recognise its authority or attend its meetings. So far all went smoothly, and this declaration was even received with favour as an outspoken frank confession which it well became them to make. But then a little point arose which showed that there was, to say the least, a strong undercurrent of opposition present. For our Chaudri on resigning the similar post of Chaudri in his old caste (which, as I have previously said, he had held) was entitled by custom to nominate his successor. Strictly to *nominate*, the acceptance or rejection of his nomination being at the option of the meeting, and when in the exercise of this right he proceeded to nominate his nephew who was not a Christian, the nomination was, after a very few moments' of discussion, rejected with something very like contempt. Then there was a lull and we waited anxiously to see what turn things would take, for now that our part was done and the object with which we had called the meeting was attained, it was just a question whether they would break up, leaving the step already taken to work its influence quietly and gradually, which was the course which we should on the whole have ourselves preferred, or whether they would proceed to the sifting of which I have spoken above. Before long it made itself very evident that the latter was their intention. It was very interesting to watch

the way in which decisions were gradually matured among them and then found expression. The whole process was essentially natural, and I fancy that on this occasion we enjoyed an insight into the real internal workings of the Panchayat system of the country, which does not fall to the lot of a great many Englishmen. As a rule, the presence of the latter, in the few cases where such presence is possible, gives an entirely forced and artificial character to the entire proceedings of the meeting, but here, under the influence of strong feelings, they plainly forgot us almost or altogether—sitting as we were quietly in the darkness and somewhat to one side—and followed instinctively their wonted procedure. Silence would reign for a time, or silence only broken by the murmuring of low voices as all the heads clustered themselves together into little knots usually round some one more or less prominent and central head, and discussed the matter in dispute, and as opinions took clearer shape the voices rose to louder utterance till the comparative silence was succeeded, first by a buzz, and then by something like a roar, as everybody, having found what he believed to be the true solution, hastened to convey it in no measured tones to his neighbour; but then out of the uproar order once more evolved itself as some one of the more prominent personages, raising himself slightly on his hips or throwing himself forward on his knees (I need scarcely say that they were all squatting round on pieces of cloth and mats on the ground), addressed by name some other notable and propounded his view of the right line of conduct to be pursued. It was very interesting, but I must not dwell on this now. As I said we soon found that the general feeling of the meeting was strongly in favour of ‘sifting out the Christians’, the process to be performed by setting a pot of Ganges water (which takes the place of our Bible in an oath) in the midst, and calling on all those who were supposed to be Christians to come forward and raise it to their foreheads in sign of worship, at the risk of being summarily ejected from the caste if they refused. One or two preliminary difficulties had first to be resolved. In the first place it was a question *who* should call upon the Christians to stand forward, and as more than one member of considerable standing and personal or family influence among the Chamárs was included in the number, it was a function from which most shrank. At first they tried to throw the odium of the active step on us by suggesting that *we* should now ascertain the real position of our converts by producing the register and reading out the names one by one, giving each the opportunity

of declaring himself in the face of all a true man. It was cleverly put, but fully entering into and *sharing* their motive, we declined, merely pointing out that the meeting had been called in accordance with the expressed wish of certain prominent members of our congregation, that these had now said their say, and, while it was of course open to any other Christian to stand up and follow their example, and we should be only too rejoiced to see any do so, on the other hand we had no wish to subject our converts to any strain for which they were not prepared; that in short, so far as we were concerned, the meeting was at an end, and any further step, if such was to be taken, must emanate from them. In the force of this they reluctantly acquiesced, and it was decided that each headman of a district should call out one by one the names of those who lay within his jurisdiction. They next asked us to oblige them with a little Ganges water for the purpose of the test, to which we replied that the article being in no demand among us was unfortunately not to hand, and sorry as we were not to be able to oblige our quasi guests in any particular, yet in this one we must ask them to provide for themselves. And it was wonderful how rapidly such provision was made, considering that the Ganges lies at a distance of not less than forty miles as the crow flies. A boy lifting a pot disappeared, taking by a curious coincidence, which I merely mention for what it is worth, the direction of the nearest well, and in an incredibly short space of time reappeared with the holy fluid. To a person sceptically disposed the incident might have presented difficulties. All *we* felt was that it was no concern of ours, and that so long as those for whose use it was intended were satisfied, we had no occasion to be anything else. And now all was ready, and after a few minutes of really very anxious suspense, for there was no question that a real crisis in the life of our little congregation had come, the calling out commenced. Designedly or otherwise it happened that the first five names called were those of men of very weak character, low esteem, and poor position among both their old and their new caste-fellows, and it was with less surprise than sorrow that I (who knew them best) saw them one after the other step forward in obedience to the summons and raise the water to their heads. It was done rather amidst the jeers, half suppressed, than the real approval of the Chamárs. On our part we made no sign, except that as each stepped forward I also advanced to the middle with a pencil and paper, and, as he lifted the water, wrote down the name as a

formal recognition of his act. But this again was a process the reverse of speedy, and meantime there was a little bye-play going on near where we were sitting of the deepest interest, and on the result of which turned the real success or failure, from our point of view, of this part of the meeting. Among the men who had taken their place from the first as Christians there was a young fellow on whose line of conduct that of many others depended. He is a very well-to-do and active man, much respected by all, Christians and Chamárs alike, a Chaudri already in his own right, and with the prospect of a second chaudrishop in reversion from his father. I knew him to be of high character, and also distinctly *inclined* towards Christianity; but how far he would be prepared to stand firm on such an occasion as the present, at the possible loss of all his old caste privileges, which are so highly valued, was, to say the least, a very open question. I say at the *possible* loss, for I ought to have said that when it was found how many, and how influential members of the meeting were involved in this matter, it was decided that the cutting them all off from caste-communion was too grave a step to be taken at once, and would have to be reserved for a united meeting of all the three sections of the Chamár brotherhood to which I have alluded above. The present action was therefore confined to ascertaining who those were, who, when it came to the point, valued their Christianity above their Chamárship, leaving the further question of the line to be pursued towards such for decision at a future and larger meeting; but at the present there seemed every reason for thinking that such line would be hostile. Much then depended on him; and while the case of the five men to whom I have already alluded was going forward fitfully and tediously, vigorous efforts were being made by his old associates to withdraw him from a position so compromising as that he at present occupied. I had myself sat down beside him for a few moments at an earlier stage of the proceeding; partly to try to encourage him to play the man, partly from an eager desire to know what his real intentions were; and on the latter point I had been much reassured by his abrupt reply to a question by which I had sought to elicit this information: 'What do you suppose I have sat down here for?' But now we saw first an old friend come and engage him in earnest conversation, evidently urging him to go over to the rank of the Chamárs; and then, as he withdrew unsuccessful, his father himself got up and moved towards him. I could not resist the temptation of being present at the interview, and again slipped quietly into my

previous place by his side. It was really a moment not to be soon forgotten. Both of them were men of strong wills, and shewed it in their faces; and as the father stooped down and looked his son full in the face for a few moments no word was exchanged. Then: 'What are you doing here?' 'In my place with the Christians.' 'Come with me at once.' 'I can't.' 'Take up the Ganges water.' 'Never.' That was all; and then, with a look of the deepest resentment, the father withdrew. To appreciate the effort this must have cost you should remember, in addition to what I have said above about his own personal position, how very strong the bonds of filial obedience in this country are, and how entirely, in return, the father looks to his son to keep up the fair name, and inherit the privileges of the house. Under these circumstances you will, I think, feel that it can have cost no slight effort to take the decided line this young fellow did, or rather that nothing short of the very real and present power of the Holy Spirit would have enabled him to quit himself so truly as a man.

This was, as I have said, the turning point of this latter part of the night's business. Even now they hesitated to call upon him openly, still hoping that if no final step was taken at once they would be able afterwards, by intimidation or persuasion, to win him over; but against this policy of inaction those men who had already apostatized loudly and, in a sense, fairly clamoured, insisting that the others should be subjected to the same strain as that under which they had themselves given way. If however they hoped to see him follow their example they were mistaken, for when at last his name was called he stood up, and very quietly and firmly said that while he had no wish to follow the lead of those who had *proprio motu* separated themselves from the Chamár brotherhood, on the other hand he was before all else a Christian, and Christian he would be, whether this should bring upon him exclusion from the caste or not. You may imagine how happy and deeply thankful we were to hear such open manly words. And behind him all the rest, who stood indeed in a position of semidependence to him, being members of the clan, of which he was by his old right Chaudri, stood firm. They were not indeed all called upon individually, for the third or fourth man who was put on his feet, instead of pursuing the courteous and semi-regretful tone which the others had used, retaliated with such an attack on some of the abuses of the Chamár brotherhood, including especially some very pungent allusions to the laziness and covetous-

ness of their head men, that they all begged him to be seated with all speed, assuring him that they had heard quite enough to prevent any possibility of mistake as to his meaning. He was in no hurry to comply with the request, and they on the other hand, when he did so, resolved that it was needless to call on any others for an expression of opinion which had now declared itself at least sufficiently. And so at 7.30 a.m. the meeting broke up, and we adjourned, with all the Christians present, to our little chapel near by for a short service, to which the events of the preceding night lent, as you will readily believe, a very special solemnity and meaning.

And now just to sum up very shortly the position in which this night's work left us and our congregation. Five men had, under strong trial it is true, but still openly and wilfully denied their Lord ; occasion sufficient surely for deep sorrow and humility and searchings of heart. On the other hand eight families had definitely stood out and broken that bond which had weighted so heavily all their previous attempts at a Christian life and stood forward, nominally at any rate, Christians and Christians only. And besides these there was another body, numbering some eight or nine heads of families, in a more or less intermediate position, not at present breaking loose from their old caste, but on the other hand pledged to do so rather than abandon their newer faith ; and in point of fact the moral influence of the latter party, though their line of conduct had been distinctly less high, was I believe of considerably the greater weight amongst their fellows. This was so because the members of the Christian Basti living on Mission property had already put themselves more or less into the position of connection and partial dependence on the Mission to which I have referred in an earlier part of my letter, and in which the more entirely single motives in an open confession of faith are at any rate backed up and strengthened by others of a more worldly nature. These men on the other hand, standing as they did in a position of entire independence, so far as any material gains are concerned, towards the Mission, had much to lose while they had nothing, so far as I know, to win by their boldness. Add to this that the conduct of the 'segregated' was, previous to the meeting, as entirely expected and assumed as the conduct of the others was the reverse, and you will be able to understand that what is in itself the lower position may well have carried, to outsiders at any rate, the greater moral weight.

And then as to later events. The very moderation of the

Chamárs in not pressing the question of immediate exclusion has prevented the results of the meeting being as clearly visible in the subsequent walk of those who declared themselves Christ's as it would otherwise have been. I mean for the present at any rate they continue in just their old connection of friendship and fellowship with the Chamárs. Nay, even in the case of those who voluntarily broke this bond, it turns out far more difficult than we had previously expected to say exactly what they have given up and how they now stand (with the exception of course of the definite abandonment by the Chaudri of his old chaudrishop), and very varying indeed are the views taken even within the Mission of the extent of their surrender. Nor may we disguise the operation of the natural law of reaction following, though I am thankful to say far from equalling, action, brought home to us as it is by the certain fact that the best of these men have not wholly clung fast to the position which they, for the time at least, genuinely occupied, but have let themselves be betrayed into actions inconsistent with a stronger faith. Yet, when all is said and done, I cannot believe but that a real point, a very real point, has been made, and that we have had at any rate unmistakeable—be they in the present individuals permanent or transient—traces of the working of a Spirit not of this world, and the earnest of greater things to come.

Wherefore we ask your prayers for them and us, and all who so sorely need them.

G. A. LEFROY.





